

Principles for Preservation

The following principles are from the City of Seattle’s International Special Review District Ordinance.

SMC 23.66.304 International District Mixed (IDM) Zone Goals and Objectives.

The IDM zone designation shall recognize and promote the area's unique social mix and urban design character. This area is the core of the International District which exemplifies Asian culture. A wide range of uses, including street-level retail, housing development above street level, and the rehabilitation of existing buildings, shall be encouraged. New residential uses and the rehabilitation of existing structures shall be encouraged to provide a diversity of residential opportunities. Specific objectives include the following:

- (1) To maintain and protect the International District core as an Asian cultural, retail and residential center;
- (2) To allow flexibility and discretion in land use controls, regulations and guidelines to address present conditions and those which may develop in the future;
- (3) To protect, preserve and promote small retail and commercial businesses;
- (4) To encourage development of housing above street level;
- (5) To encourage the rehabilitation of existing buildings; and
- (6) To assure new development compatible in scale and character with existing buildings.

SMC 23.66.306 International District Residential (IDR) Zone Goals and Objectives.

The International District residential area shall be predominantly a residential neighborhood with primarily residential uses. Other compatible uses shall be permitted to the extent that they reinforce and do not detract from the primary use of the area. The IDR designation and the regulations of the International Special Review District shall recognize and promote the area's unique social and urban design character. Special objectives include:

- (1) The establishment of the International District hilltop as one of downtown's predominant residential neighborhoods;
- (2) The development of flexible land use controls, regulations and guidelines to address present conditions and those which may develop in the future;
- (3) The design, siting and construction of structures which minimize view blockage from Kobe Terrace Park and from existing structures which are used primarily for residential purposes;
- (4) The design, siting and construction of structures which insure reasonable solar exposure and air circulation to adjacent properties;
- (5) The design, siting and construction of structures that are aesthetically compatible with the area's steep topography and/or nearby public open spaces.

The following goals and principles were developed in the International District Urban Design Plan

The public right-of-way that makes up our streets and sidewalks is an enormous public resource and potential source of open space that should be treated as an opportunity to beautify the community and help facilitate economic development. Streetscapes and open spaces should facilitate community building—the healthy interaction of people in a neighborhood. That includes incorporating community events, interaction and process in their planning, construction and use. Sidewalks and paths should facilitate pedestrian movement within the community, as well as to adjacent neighborhoods. Improvements must enhance the pedestrian environment, which includes exposing commercial activity to the street (sidewalk) or on the street.

Japantown (Nihonmachi)

The Japanese American community has settled in the District for more than a century. Inhabiting areas around the Yesler Terrace area before World War II and some blocks south of Jackson St., Japantown, also known as Nihonmachi, has shrunk to an area north of Jackson St. and south of Yesler Way, west of the I-5 freeway and east of 4th Ave. The Uwajimaya development and ownership of three city blocks, demarcates the extension of Japanese-American influenced businesses elsewhere in the District. Before World War II, this neighborhood had bathhouses and laundries, hotels, teahouses, schools and a theater. Fifth Ave. and Main St. housed the first Uwajimaya store, before it moved south of Jackson St. It was a thriving community until the internment of all Japanese Americans during World War II, when families were sent away to rural internment camps. While many people returned to Japantown after the war to run hotels, shops or other businesses, many had lost their businesses and began new lives elsewhere.

The intersection of Sixth Ave. and Main St. has been the historical center of the Japanese American community in Seattle. Uwajimaya's presence on Sixth Ave. and several Japanese small businesses, including the Panama Hotel and Teahouse on Main St. reflects the continued importance of the two spines of this community. Much of Japantown, however, has transformed over the last fifty years, where many buildings have been leveled and turned into surface parking lots.

As documented by historian Dr. Gail Dubrow at the University of Washington, historic Japanese districts are disappearing nationally. However, Dr. Dubrow argues that Seattle’s Japantown is the most intact Japanese American district in the United States, especially considering that exceptional buildings like the Nippon Kan Theater, the NP Hotel, the old Japanese Language School, and the Panama Hotel and Teahouse with the original Japanese bathhouse still standing. Besides these historic resources, a strong Japanese American community lives throughout the Puget Sound area and uses the various amenities in Japantown, as well as the Chinatown and Little Saigon neighborhoods. The Uwajimaya development and the recently renovated Panama Teahouse and NP Hotel are prominent reminders that the Japanese American community still plays a prominent role in this District. Uwajimaya attracts the most customers of any retail business in the community, while articles have been written about the Panama Teahouse (*Seattle Lifestyles* and *Pacific Northwest Magazine*).

Preservation and Urban Design Goals and Principles

Danny Woo International District Community Garden is another example that Japantown is a vibrant neighborhood. Blackberry brambles were systematically removed from the garden’s hillside in the mid-1970’s by community activists. This garden is still a vibrant, vital and important resource for the community, as it is constantly being cared for by community residents and social organizations. Inter*Im, who manages this space, has made a concerted effort over the last five years to prune the trees throughout the garden, including the trees along Main St. The added visibility of garden activities enriches and enlivens the streetscape along Main St. and down Maynard Ave. to Chinatown. In addition, Japantown has Kobe Terrace Park and two designated green streets providing the opportunity of developing Japantown as a very unique part of Seattle. Topographically, Japantown rises up on a hillside with sweeping views of Elliott Bay and Beacon Hill. In addition, the waterfront streetcar line that goes through the Pioneer Square area terminates in the Japantown neighborhood.

The numerous empty lots and surface parking areas needs to be analyzed, considering that this area may be a source of tremendous growth in the next decade. These developments will impact the streets, open space residential ratio and livability for the greater community. Consequently the District needs to promote a community driven vision for how potential new developments should be stitched together.

New construction will attract more residents and retail, enlivening Main St. and enhancing Kobe Terrace Park and Danny Woo Garden as safe, active public open spaces. One vision for what this neighborhood could become is highlighted on the next page. It is important that new construction is sensitive to the sunlight and views of the park and garden and to the scale and architectural integrity of the surrounding historic structures. Mixed-use buildings with parking below grade or behind the structure, restaurants and retail on the ground floor and housing above would best encourage pedestrian activity. The connection to Japantown from Pioneer Square would be strengthened with strategic wayfinding that is integrated with Green Street improvements. This would draw people from the streetcar up to the park at the top of the hill. The intersection of Green Streets at Main St. and Maynard Ave. provides an opportunity to create a park-like public square. The intersection could be repaved with the same material as the sidewalk, and the new buildings on either corner could be designed with gardens and plazas on the corners to define the public square.

Japantown

- Main street should be a park-like green street (it is already designated as such) featuring the intersections at Sixth Ave. and Main St. with public art and Maynard Ave. and Main St. as a park-like plaza.
- Work on and extend the Green Street on Maynard Ave. from the Danny Woo Community Garden to Hing Hay Park. Look at installing tree pods, a mid-block crosswalk between Jackson St. and Main St., and other landscape features on Maynard Ave.
- When the area between Fourth/Sixth Avenues and Yesler Way/Jackson St. is developed, the streets should include trees, lighting, furniture and public art that are consistent to the rest of the community, if not improved to the approval and assistance of the International Special Review District.
- Add steps, street furniture and landscaping to help people climb both Maynard and Seventh Avenues.

- Develop a public arts plan around Main St. and Sixth Ave. to highlight Japanese American culture and history.

Main Street (This section was recently added by Nakano Associates)

- Highlight intersection at Sixth Ave. and Main St. as the center of historic Japantown. This could be done through paving, public art and other wayfinding elements. These elements should help newcomers to the area understand its historical significance. This should be an opportunity for the community to come together every year to participate in the remaking of that marker.
- Encourage mixed-use in construction with sensitivity in color, materials, scale and detailing to existing adjacent buildings.
- Continue use of honey locust as the street tree in this area along Main St.
- Since the slope is often steep in this area, new construction should incorporate playful treatment of stormwater in fountains and water features. These should be related in concept to Japanese character, fish and aquatic natural systems. Pave intersection at Main St. and Maynard Ave. with same material and pattern as sidewalk as part of Green Street Improvements.

Claiming Two Intersections—Sixth Ave. and Main St., Main St. and Maynard Ave.

Main St. is already designated by the City of Seattle as a Green Street and is bordered on one side by the Danny Woo Garden. It is envisioned as a landscaped pedestrian way with more attention given to advanced methods of stormwater treatment. It is also an excellent opportunity to mark one intersection with public art to identify the historical heart of the Japanese community at Sixth Ave. and Main St. and affect new development at Main St. and Maynard Ave. to respond to the intersection as a public square. Focus on this street would also provide a stronger visual connection to the heart of Chinatown at Hing Hay Park. The idea is that the community work together to create a design for the intersection, which could also be held as a competition, and then they would paint the intersection together. This cooperation would build community, create immediate change, and become a promise for protecting the memory of that place. The intersection should be repainted by the community every year as a celebration.

Neighborhood Plan Goals and Objectives

- Improve circulation within the International District, including better transit services, bicycle amenities, and pedestrian-oriented physical enhancements within the community.
- Maintain and activate existing public parks, as well as acquire a new open space for the community.
- Preserve existing low-income units, encourage more family housing and moderate income units and rehabilitate existing vacant and sub-standard buildings.
- Support safe night-time businesses and a diversity of small businesses, and assist small businesses in finding external resources.

Preservation Tool-Kit

Rules and Regulatory Environment

The Seattle historic landmark designation process consists of four steps: nominating the building, object, or site; meeting designation standards; issuing controls and incentives for preservation of the landmark; and receiving an official, designating ordinance as an historic landmark. A landmark must be at least 25 years old and satisfy at least one of the six standards of designation as outlined in the Seattle Landmarks Preservation Ordinance. Applications are evaluated on a continuous basis throughout the year. Additional information on the landmark designation standards and process is available on the following City of Seattle website:

http://www.cityofseattle.net/neighborhoods/preservation/designation_process.htm

The Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (OAHP) locally administers the National Register of Historic Places, an official list of national cultural resources worthy of preservation including districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture. The Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior Standards for Archaeology and Historic Preservation dictate what cultural resources are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and are available through the National Park Service at the following website:

http://www.cr.nps.gov/local-law/arch_stnds_0.htm

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation are ten basic principles created to help preserve the distinctive character of a historic building and its site, while allowing for reasonable change to meet new needs. Rehabilitations must meet the Standards to be eligible for the 20% federal rehabilitation tax credit. The Standards maintain that a property's historic character, use, or defining characteristics will be preserved. A full description of the Standards may be obtained at the following National Park Service website:

<http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/tax/rehabstandards.htm>

Main Guidelines for Alterations to Special Review District Properties

The International Special Review District (ISRD) is one of Seattle's historic districts. Certain changes to properties within the ISRD require a Certificate of Approval from the Board and the Director of the Department of Neighborhoods before the City will issue any permits. Such changes requiring review include:

- Any change to the outside of any building or structure (including painting)
- Installation of any new sign or change to any existing sign
- Installation of a new awning or canopy
- Any change to an interior that affects the exterior
- New addition, construction, and/or remodel

- A proposed new business or service (change of use)
- Any change in a public right-of-way or other public spaces, including parks and sidewalks
- Demolition of an building or structure

A Certificate of Approval is an official notice of approval issued by the International Special Review District (ISRD) Board and not a City permit to conduct the changes. Additional permits must be received from the appropriate City departments such as the Department of Design, Construction and Land Use (DCLU).

The regulations and guidelines that govern the ISRD are Seattle Municipal Code 23.66, Design Guidelines for Awnings and Canopies/Façade Alterations/Security/and Signs, and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. For a complete set of regulations and guidelines for the ISRD, please contact the ISRD Coordinator at 206.684.0226.

Tools, Incentives, and Mechanisms for Preservation

The City of Seattle Historic Preservation Program in the Department of Neighborhoods offers incentives and mechanisms for landmark property owners to rehabilitate their properties including zoning and building code relief, and a special tax valuation for historic properties that keeps landmark property taxes at the rate prior to substantial rehabilitation for 10 years. Property owners interested in the special tax valuation program must submit an application with the King County Department of Assessment by October 1 after rehabilitation work has been completed. Applicants for zoning and building code relief must file an application with the Department of Construction and Land Use. Landmarks located in certain areas of Seattle's Downtown share additional incentives to transfer/sell the landmark property's development rights to other developers in the downtown area, exemptions from restrictions on commercial density in a residential zone, performing arts bonuses for preserved building façades, and development disincentives to demolish landmarks. Additional information on these tools is available at the following City of Seattle website:

http://www.cityofseattle.net/neighborhoods/preservation/incentives_state.htm

The City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods also offers a Neighborhood Matching Fund to support neighborhood improvements, neighborhood planning, neighborhood organizing and public school/neighborhood partnerships that have a public benefit. The competitive selection process has different funding cycles and application deadlines each year. Additional information on this tool and specific due dates are available at the following City of Seattle website:

<http://www.cityofseattle.net/neighborhoods/nmf/about.htm>

Properties on the National Register of Historic Places are eligible to receive additional preservation incentives including façade easements, special grants-in-aid and the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit. The nomination process is evaluated on a continuous basis throughout the year. More information about these tools may be obtained through the Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation:

<http://www.oahp.wa.gov/info/lgd/oahp/>

The Washington State Housing Finance Commission locally administers the US Internal Revenue Code's Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program. The tax credits offer a dollar-for-dollar reduction in tax liability to property owners and investors who agree to provide low-income housing for up to 40 years. The competitive application process is annual and the deadline for applications is usually mid-May. More information on this program is available at the following website:

<http://www.wshfc.org/tax-credits/index.htm>

The Seattle Office of Economic Development offers a development Funding Opportunity for Non-Profit Organizations to nonprofit organizations providing services in a Seattle neighborhood business district. Grants can support physical improvements in business districts such as benches, lighting enhancements, trash cans, graffiti removal and other improvements. Applications are due by 5:00pm on June 16 and Rob Watt (206-684-3348) is the contact person for this funding opportunity:

<http://www.cityofseattle.net/economicdevelopment/subpages/rfps.htm>

The Seattle Office of Arts and Culture (formerly the Seattle Arts Commission) offers funding to Neighborhood Arts Councils to support recurring festivals or events through the annual Neighborhood Arts Pilot Initiative program. Neighborhood Arts Councils must be in existence for at least one year to be eligible and the event or festival must take place inside the geographic district of the council. Applications for the 2003 program are due by 5:00pm on July 2 and additional information is available at:

<http://www.cityofseattle.net/arts/fundingapplications/default.asp>

The City of Seattle's Office of Housing's Multi-Family Rehab Loan Program offers low cost loans to building owners in the Pioneer Square and Chinatown/International District neighborhoods for rehabilitation that includes affordable housing, preservation of buildings in these historic districts, economic revitalization, or creation of new affordable housing units. Additional information on the terms and application process for this program can be obtained at the following website:

<http://www.cityofseattle.net/housing/03-HousingDevelopers/MultiFamilyRehabLoan.htm>

Examples From Seattle International District

Examples of preserved and rehabilitated properties in the International District that used various local preservation tools and mechanisms include the NP Hotel and the Eastern Hotel. By contrast, the Panama Hotel is an excellent example of preservation through private investment. Neighborhood improvements and artwork are other important forms of cultural preservation represented by the CIDBA Dragon Pole project.

The NP Hotel is owned and operated by Inter*Im Community Development Association. The project was completed in November 1994 with approximately \$5.8 million in tax credits through both the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit program and the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program. It is a mixed-use building with 63 units of low-income housing and ground floor commercial space. Additional information is available on this project through the Inter*Im website:

<http://www.interimicda.org/ahp.shtml>

The Eastern Hotel is also owned and operated by the Inter*Im Community Development Association. The project was completed in 1998 with approximately \$6 million in tax credits through the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program and the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit program. The Eastern also used the Neighborhood Matching Fund to partially fund a mural by Eliseo Silva in its lobby that reflects the lives of Filipino American laborers who were once housed in the building. The Eastern Hotel is a mixed-used building with 47 units of low-income housing and ground floor commercial space. Additional information is available on the project through the Department of Neighborhoods May 2001 newsletter:

http://www.cityofseattle.net/neighborhoods/news/News_May2001.pdf

The Panama Hotel is preserved by the private investment and dedication of owner Jan Johnson. The historic property contains the preserved Hashidate-Yu bathhouse with guided tours. Johnson also operates a teahouse in the building's street level storefronts that maintains the character and ground floor usage of the property. These efforts to preserve the Panama have been recognized by the State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation. An NHL nomination for the property is pending. Additional information on the property is available at the Panama Hotel website:

<http://www.panamahotel.net/default.htm>

The Chinatown/International District Business Improvement Area (CIDBA) sponsored the CIDBA Dragon Pole art project through the use of the Neighborhood Matching Fund. The creative project uses 11 hand sculpted dragon sculptures as boundary markers and alternative "gateways" to the community. Additional information is available on the project through the CIDBA website:

<http://www.internationaldistrict.org/dragonpole.htm>

Charrette Visioning Exercise



Nihonmachi Charrette

The day-long event included background presentations by a variety of experts, lunch and a self-guided walk through historic Japantown, the charrette and presentations of teams' findings.

Charrette Day Schedule	
9:00am–9:30am	Welcome and Introductions—Panama Hotel Gallery
9:30am–11:30am	Presentations—Panama Hotel Gallery
9:30am	History of Nihonmachi and Preservation Efforts in Other Cities— <i>Gail Dubrow</i>
9:45am	Plans for the International District— <i>Inter*Im and Local Property Owners</i>
10:30am	City-Wide Developments Affecting the ID— <i>CityDesign and Sharon Sutton</i>
11:15am	Preservation Planning Tools and Guidelines— <i>Eugenia Woo</i>
11:30am–11:45am	Charge to the Teams— <i>Gail Dubrow</i>
11:45am–1:00pm	Lunch and Walk Around to Assess Conditions—Bathhouse and NP Lobby open 12–1pm
1:00pm–3:00pm	Work in Teams—Panama Hotel Gallery and Bush Hotel
3:00pm–4:00pm	Presentation of Findings—Panama Hotel Gallery



The two charrette teams work through the visioning exercise.

The following questions were provided to guide the work of the charrette teams. The work is divided into three sections: (1) Inventory and Assessment; (2) Proposed Interventions; and (3) Implementation Strategies. Teams were asked to record their ideas in visual and written form as appropriate, with notes that would allow future readers to discern their intentions. Each team was asked to organize a presentation that covered these three elements. Charrette teams were also encouraged to have their presentations include ideas appropriate at both the larger “urban village” scale as well as those in the 12-block area that surrounds Sixth Ave. and S. Main St.

(1) Inventory and Assessment

Walk around the immediate area, using the map of the surrounding 12 blocks that we have provided. (The Hashidate-Yu bathhouse and NP Hotel lobby will be open for brief tours during the lunch hour so that you can see some of the treasures that are not currently visible from the street.) Inventory and assess the kinds of visual and physical remnants of Nihonmachi that survive. Take notes, both in visual and text form, of the physical elements in the urban environment that make you aware that you are in the historic Japantown.

- What features mark Sixth Ave. and S. Main St. as the historic center of Seattle’s Nihonmachi/Japantown?
- Identify and map key “landmarks” that contribute to the historic Nihonmachi, both in the immediate vicinity of 6th and South Main and at the broader scale of the urban village.
 - Which businesses, signage and storefronts remain?
 - Is there historical signage that could be restored / re-used?
 - Is there any historical advertising that could be restored / re-used?
 - Are there any placards or historical markers?
- What elements of post-war construction/development contribute to and detract from the sense of 6th and South Main as Japantown/Nihonmachi?
- Are there particular features that are incongruous with the historic character?

Charrette Visioning Exercise

- Are there things that you would like to change to improve the sense of place?
- What elements that contribute to the historic character of Nihonmachi are likely to be affected by impending regional and city-wide projects (Sound Transit, waterfront planning, Blue Ring, etc.)? How might these projects be used to enhance the sense of place?
- What spaces in the neighborhood are in need of redevelopment?
- What interventions could be used to strengthen the identity and increase the visibility of Nihonmachi?
- What are some of the most important extant elements (from signage to buildings) that contribute to the historic character of the neighborhood? What restoration, maintenance or other actions are needed to protect them?

Please complete your inventory and assessment by 1pm, when the teams will begin work. The first step when teams assemble should be to share perceptions gained from the neighborhood walk and develop an assessment of existing conditions that is mutually agreeable among team members.

2) Proposed Interventions

Based on your inventory and assessment, please spend the bulk of your time generating ideas for restoring and enhancing the sense of place in Seattle's Japantown. Some possible issues include:

- Identify physical (and other) interventions that would make Japanese American history more visible in the neighborhood and which would enhance the sense of place.
- Consider how Seattle's Nihonmachi might be connected (by internet, transportation, marketing, organizationally or via other "connections") to other Japanese American cultural resources in the wider Seattle area, and the region.
- What new uses could be brought into the neighborhood to enhance its vitality?
 - What uses draw members of the Japanese American community to the area?
 - What uses draw tourists and others, both to the district and to 6th and Main?
 - What historical uses could be remembered, reincorporated, adapted, etc. (for example, street car noises, steam from the bathhouses)
- How can the use of signage increase the public visibility of Nihonmachi? At what scales?
 - Is there historic signage that could be restored, reused?
 - Is there historical advertising that could be restored, reused?
 - Would placards or other markers be appropriate?

- Which facades or buildings in the area ought to be the focus of restoration efforts?
 - What details are critical to restoration?
 - What treatments are recommended?
- Could a walking tour of Nihonmachi be developed? What might be the general itinerary? What institution might be the best base for developing and operating such a tour? In what form, if any, should the landmarks be "marked" on site?
- How might public art contribute to a sense of place in Nihonmachi?
- Are murals an appropriate way to mitigate intrusions (e.g., blank walls on tall buildings) or to engender a sense of place? Where might they be located, if at all?
- What part does neighborhood topography play in shaping streetlife and how could it be utilized most successfully?
- What role might streetscape design play in contributing to an enhanced identity for Nihonmachi, both at 6th and Main and in the wider neighborhood? Consider such elements as street lights and other street furniture elements, such as benches, garbage cans, newspaper boxes, kiosks, public toilets, APTs, telephones, drinking fountains, street trees, etc. What role should culturally specific aesthetics (e.g., traditional Japanese design elements) play in redesigning the streetscape? What form should they take? With what consequences?

(3) Implementation Strategies

In preparing for your presentation, please identify your top recommendations for interventions that would restore and enhance the sense of place in Seattle's Nihonmachi. Consider the following questions as you begin to connect your ideas with strategies for implementation:

- Are there successful strategies from other neighborhoods, either in Seattle or elsewhere, that provide viable models for preserving and revitalizing Nihonmachi?
- Please match up existing implementation tools with your recommendations to provide a sense of how it might be possible to move forward from here.
- What partnerships are critical to the success of the proposed interventions?
- What are your key recommendations for future action?

Presentation

Please organize the visual part of your presentation on the four boards that have been provided. Fifteen minutes (maximum) has been set aside for each team's presentation, to allow time for discussion.

Charrette Findings

On the day of the charrette, two teams consisting of about 15 participants each worked independently to develop a vision for enhancing and restoring the sense of place in Seattle’s Nihonmachi. While the two charrette teams’ approaches to the problem were different in many ways, there was notable overlap in their vision for Nihonmachi. The teams’ primary difference was their approach to the geographic scope and scale of the study area. One team conceptualized the issues at a somewhat larger scale by defining what interventions might draw both new residents and tourists to the area and enhance the presence of Japanese and Japanese American culture in the district. Their ideas included development of a wayfinding system, Japanese animé movies, daycare and schooling, and family and subsidized housing. In addition, they explored the use of regulatory mechanisms such as zoning changes to allow for more residential development. The second team honed in on Seattle’s historic Nihonmachi by defining South Main Street as the focal point with three critical nodes that might be points of emphasis for particular kinds of community investment and development. In this scheme, Fifth Ave. would be the commercial node, Sixth Ave. the historic node, and Seventh Ave. the cultural and community node.



Representatives from charrette teams present their findings.



Audience for the public presentations.

Inventory

Both teams identified the historic form of Nihonmachi as linear, with Main St. serving as the spine. Many of the extant structures representative of the area’s history and contemporary Japanese American businesses are clustered along this spine. While the continuing presence of Japanese American residents and visitors is the most significant sign of community, the physical signs of Japanese American culture are somewhat limited. They include several advertising signs like that of the Standard Café, some street-level indications like the Higo storefront, historic façades like that of the Panama Hotel and Nippon Kan Theater and several wood frame buildings including the old Main Street School building. In addition, the cherry trees at Fifth Ave. and S. Main St. give a temporal nod to the district’s Japanese heritage. Many signs that marked Japantown’s historic resources are no longer extant, such as the Hashidate-Yu sign and Pacific Coast Printing billboard—these played an important part in signifying Sixth Ave. and S. Main St. as the historic center of Nihonmachi. The loss of the few historic building and landscape features that were designed in the Japanese style, particularly the old Maneki’s that connected the Panama and NP Hotels with Nippon Kan Theater, have left gaps in the historic fabric of Japantown.



Vestiges of historic character: Standard Café sign, Main Street School building and Panama Hotel façade.

East-west travel is difficult because of steep topography, which is of particular concern because of a significant number of elderly residents in the district. However, this dramatic grade change also affords spectacular views of the city and Elliot Bay. A number of empty spaces—vacant lots and parking lots—also provide city and water views, but contribute to the sense that there are major gaps in the urban fabric within the historic boundaries of Japantown. Danny Woo Community Garden serves as the primary usable open space.

Interventions

To be successful, Nihonmachi should not only play host to visitors, but also serve as a twenty-four-hour residential community. Creating this community requires a number of changes including provision of housing and more pedestrian-oriented streets and sidewalks. In addition, increased and varied commercial and public activities would help bring people to the district and make it more livable for residents: a wayfinding system, animé movies, bowling, martial arts, daycare, schooling and both market-rate and affordable housing. It is particularly important to balance housing types so those currently living and working in this community are not displaced, while a new and more vital mix of incomes and uses provides a base for revitalizing the community.

The creation and implementation of a comprehensive streetscape plan would allow for a more holistic treatment of pedestrian as well as other urban design issues (see Illustration 1). Such a plan would include a wayfinding system; lighting, for both safety and highlighting historic buildings/features; building facades; street trees; and circulation issues for transit, pedestrians and vehicles. Streetscape elements should be pedestrian-scaled and some, such as signs, could be Japanese American in character. Restoring and recreating the signs that mark historic places, such as the Hanshidate-Yu bathhouse and Pacific Coast Printing billboard on Sixth Ave. and S. Main St., are critical to regaining the sense of place in old Japantown (see Illustration 2). Rights-of-way that are not easily negotiated by pedestrians because they do not have sidewalks (Sixth Ave. north of Washington St.) or are very steep (many streets including Sixth Ave., Washington St. and Maynard Ave.), must be made more navigable. Solutions could include putting in sidewalks, handrails, steps and resting spaces (e.g. benches, garbage cans, etc.), or more dramatic interventions like installing a tram/streetcar or urban escalator like that in downtown Hong Kong. In addition, one team recommended creating a pedestrian trail within the

Nihonmachi district that would identify key landmarks and provide an interpretive system that makes the significance of the place more visible to the public. A suggested route was on the west side of I-5 through Danny Woo Community Garden and Kobe Terrace Park.

Vacant lots, vast paved open areas created by parking lots and empty storefronts detract from the potential vitality of the pedestrian environment and contribute to a widespread public perception that this area is unsafe (see Illustrations 4–6 for images of infill development). Current plans for redevelopment lie in the hands of particular property owners, with little coordination or community planning to explore the potential synergies that might lead to broader community revitalization in the Japantown area. The charrette teams identified several areas as critical to future revitalization efforts. These include the Standard Café building; the Aristocrats building, which is currently a one-story structure; and the empty storefront next to Osami’s Barbershop.

Emerging plans to develop a new Japanese American cultural and community center, spearheaded by Nikkei Heritage Association of Washington, caught the attention of charrette teams who raised questions about how this effort might be integrated into broader schemes for revitalizing Seattle’s Nihonmachi. The teams had different suggestions for the location of the Japanese cultural/community center. One suggested renovating the Nippon Kan Theater for use as the center. The other recommended the center be co-located with Inter*Im’s planned mixed-use development to create a node on S. Main St. between Maynard and Seventh Aves. In the meantime, advocates for the new cultural community center have yet to decide whether it will involve new construction, the rehabilitation of a historic building or some combination of the two, with the location of the center to be determined. Thus, ideas generated by charrette participants mainly were intended to open up consideration of the relationship between this initiative and the preservation of Nihonmachi.

Charrette participants also felt that smaller gestures to make Nihonmachi more publicly visible are important. Neighborhood identifiers should be placed in numerous locations throughout the district, however it is particularly important to mark people’s entry into Nihonmachi. The primary pedestrian entry is at Fifth Ave. and S. Main St. and the main vehicular entry is at Sixth Ave. and Yesler Way (see Illustrations 3–6). Gestures could include banners specific to Nihonmachi, ethnic street signs, welcome signs, cherry trees as street trees and the incorporation of culturally meaningful symbols into the streetscape (e.g. diverse dragons to incorporate current branding efforts). Artwork is another identifier that could be used to reference Japanese American culture and highlight regional preservation efforts and connections. One team suggested a program in which Seattle exchanged street signs with a sister city and displayed these in Nihonmachi. This suggestion raises the broader issue of the extent to which Japanese connections, for example ties to a sister city, as opposed to Japanese American heritage are the appropriate cultural frameworks for restoring a sense of place in old Japantown.

There is little green space in the International District as a whole and Japantown is no exception. However, the historic boundaries of Nihonmachi do boast one of the most well-maintained and community-oriented green spaces, Danny Woo Community Garden, which is operated by Inter*Im. The location of this garden at the top of a steep slope, where it is obscured by buildings lessens its visibility. For that reason, charrette participants advocated interventions that connect the garden with Jackson St. To allude to the garden’s presence and draw people up the hill, some kind of indicator(s), such as a line of cherry trees or a Danny Woo garden shop, could be placed on or along Maynard Ave. from Jackson St., alerting the public to the treasure that awaits them just one block uphill (see Illustration 1).

Implementation

The integration of these ideas into the emerging urban design plan for the International District would help to advance their implementation. The identification of Nihonmachi as a planning subarea is a critical first step in ensuring that Japanese American cultural resources are protected and the sense of place in old Japantown is enhanced as a result of future preservation and development efforts in the area. Systematic efforts to identify historic properties associated with historic Nihonmachi and plan for their preservation are needed to ensure that the extant resources fully benefit from the protections and incentives that are available to historic properties under federal, state, and local programs. Some properties, such as the Panama Hotel and Hasidate-Yu, Nippon Kan Hall, and the Japanese Language School, may be eligible for National Historic Landmark designation on account of their overarching national significance and high degree of physical integrity. These, along with other Japanese American cultural resources, might benefit from coordinated planning to explore their combined potential as destinations for heritage tourism

A number of regulatory changes would help preserve existing historic buildings and views and make creating more green space feasible. Zoning that allows for higher buildings than what currently exist makes increased density possible, but it can also threaten preservation of valuable historic buildings, views and open space. However, allowing transfer of development rights (TDR) from historic buildings that do not maximize their zoning-allowed floor space to other properties (such as vacant lots and parking lots) or to a central “bank” so that owners of historic properties or green space can sell the rights to develop that additional floor space to other developers would lessen the threat of historic buildings being razed or views and open space being lost. In Nihonmachi, this would not only help preserve buildings and open space, but if the TDR were targeted to vacant parcels, it might induce owners of these parcels to redevelop what is currently a blight. In addition, zoning changes that would allow for more housing and skinny towers (e.g. Vancouver, Canada) in the International District would contribute to making this a more lively and livable community.



Danny Woo International District Community Garden.

Charrette Findings

Design guidelines for new construction could help maintain and enhance the historic character of Nihonmachi. Incentives for small businesses and cultural facilities would make the district a more lucrative place to be located. Extending Main St.'s designation as a Green Street to the waterfront would make an important connection between Nihonmachi and downtown Seattle.

Investments in the neighborhood will also make urban design interventions possible. Seattle's Green Streets program is one of the few ways that city money can be spent on public space improvements regardless of what development is occurring on surrounding private property; such improvements could help jump-start private development. Neighborhood matching funds could finance street signs, banners, and other unique neighborhood identifiers. A program that uses revolving loan funds could be started to assist property owners with façade improvements. The Port could invest in the area as part of the "Pacific Rim" strategy for economic development.

The following drawings (pages 46–49) illustrate the charrette teams' recommendations for Nihonmachi, however they are not intended as specific designs.

Existing



Public Comment

The charrette was only the beginning of creating more visibility and interest in recapturing a sense of place for Seattle's Nihonmachi. This working draft document provides background information and a report on the charrette itself to help spark even more ideas on how to create this sense of place. To that end, we are seeking comments and suggestions from the public. Please refer to the charrette visioning questions on pages 41–42 and provide suggestions and drawings on the following Public Comment form of what you feel would revitalize Japantown; in addition, please include any comments regarding the recommendations made by the charrette teams (refer to the Charrette Findings section on pages 43–45). Return your comments and sketches by November 1, 2003 to Gail Dubrow at 410-C Gould Hall, Box 355740, College of Architecture & Urban Planning, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195-5740; or email your responses to her at dubrow@u.washington.edu. This entire document as well as the comments form is also available at the CityDesign website: <http://www.cityofseattle.net/dclu/citydesign>.

Improved

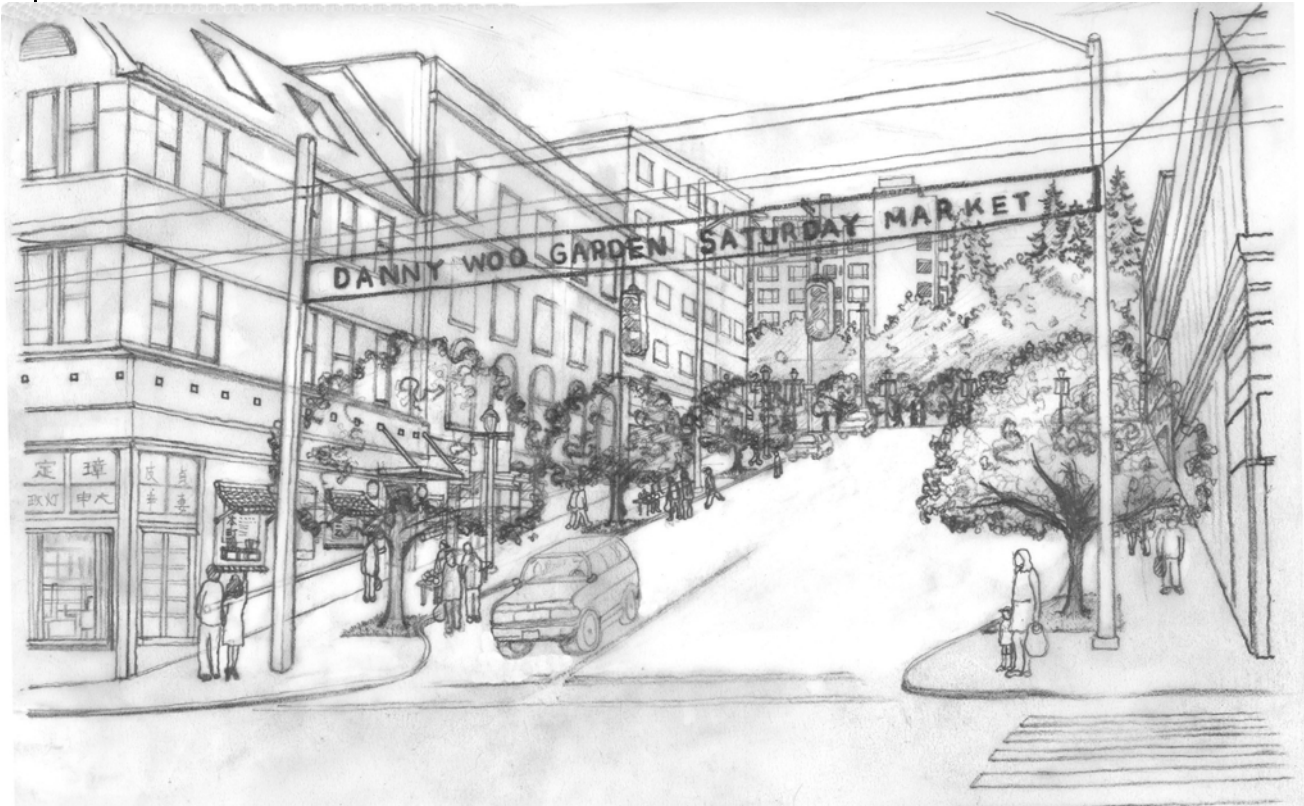


Illustration 1: View up Maynard Ave. from Jackson St. to Danny Woo Community Garden with addition of streetscape elements such as street trees, banners, and kiosks, and infill development. Drawing by Mieko Ishihara

Charrette Findings

Existing



Improved



Illustration 2: East side of Jackson Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues with old billboards recreated and streetscape improvements. Drawing by Mieko Ishihara

Existing



Improved

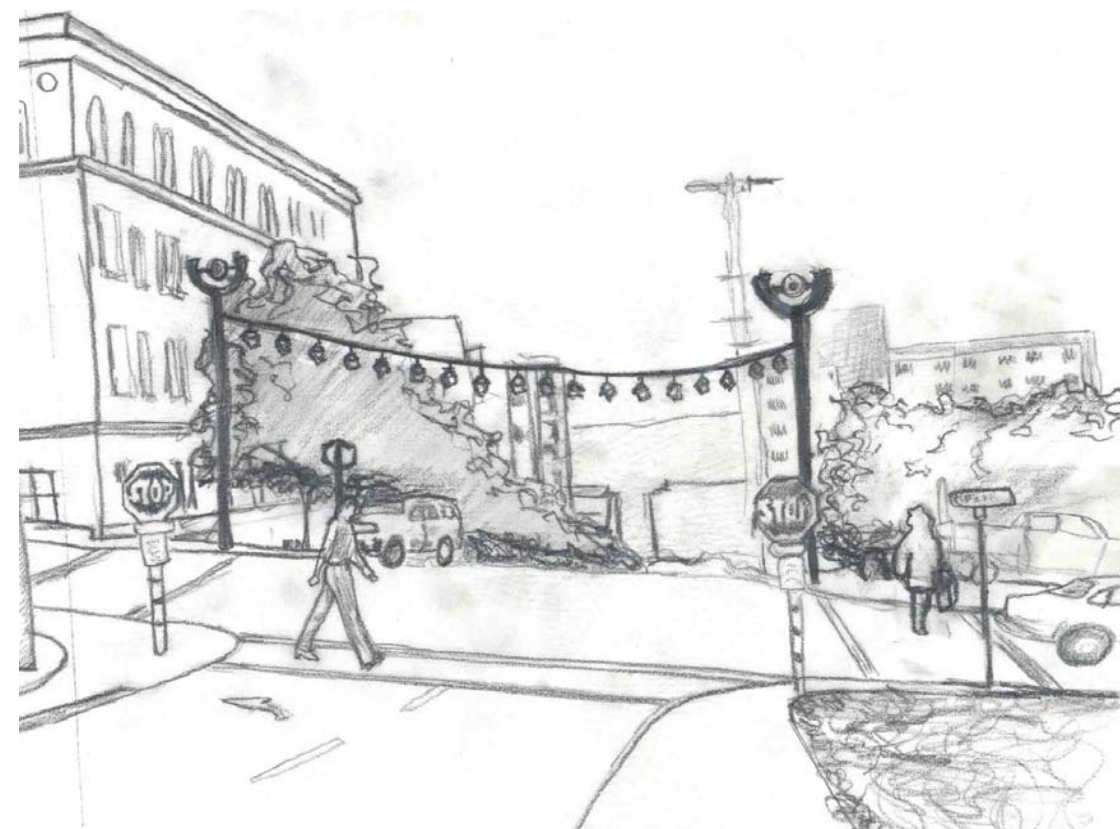


Illustration 3: Primary vehicle entry into Nihonmachi at Sixth Ave. and Yesler Way

Charrette Findings



Illustration 4



Illustration 5



Illustration 6

Illustrations 4–6: Pedestrian entry into Nihonmachi at Fifth Ave. and S. Main St. These three drawings illustrate different degrees of interventions that could be used to signify entry into Japantown, from the fewest and smallest gestures (Illustration 4), to larger scale interventions (Illustration 6). They also depict infill developments. Drawings by Mieko Ishihara and Anna O’Connell

Public Comment Form

Following is a reference map of Seattle's historic Japantown area. Please also feel free use this map as a basis for sketches or comments that pertain to specific places within Nihonmachi. Return your comments and sketches by November 1, 2003 to Gail Dubrow at 410-C Gould Hall, Box 355740, College of Architecture & Urban Planning, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195-5740; or email your responses to her at dubrow@u.washington.edu. This entire document as well as the Public Comment Form is also available at the CityDesign website: <http://www.cityofseattle.net/dclu/citydesign>.

Please provide your contact information.

Name: _____

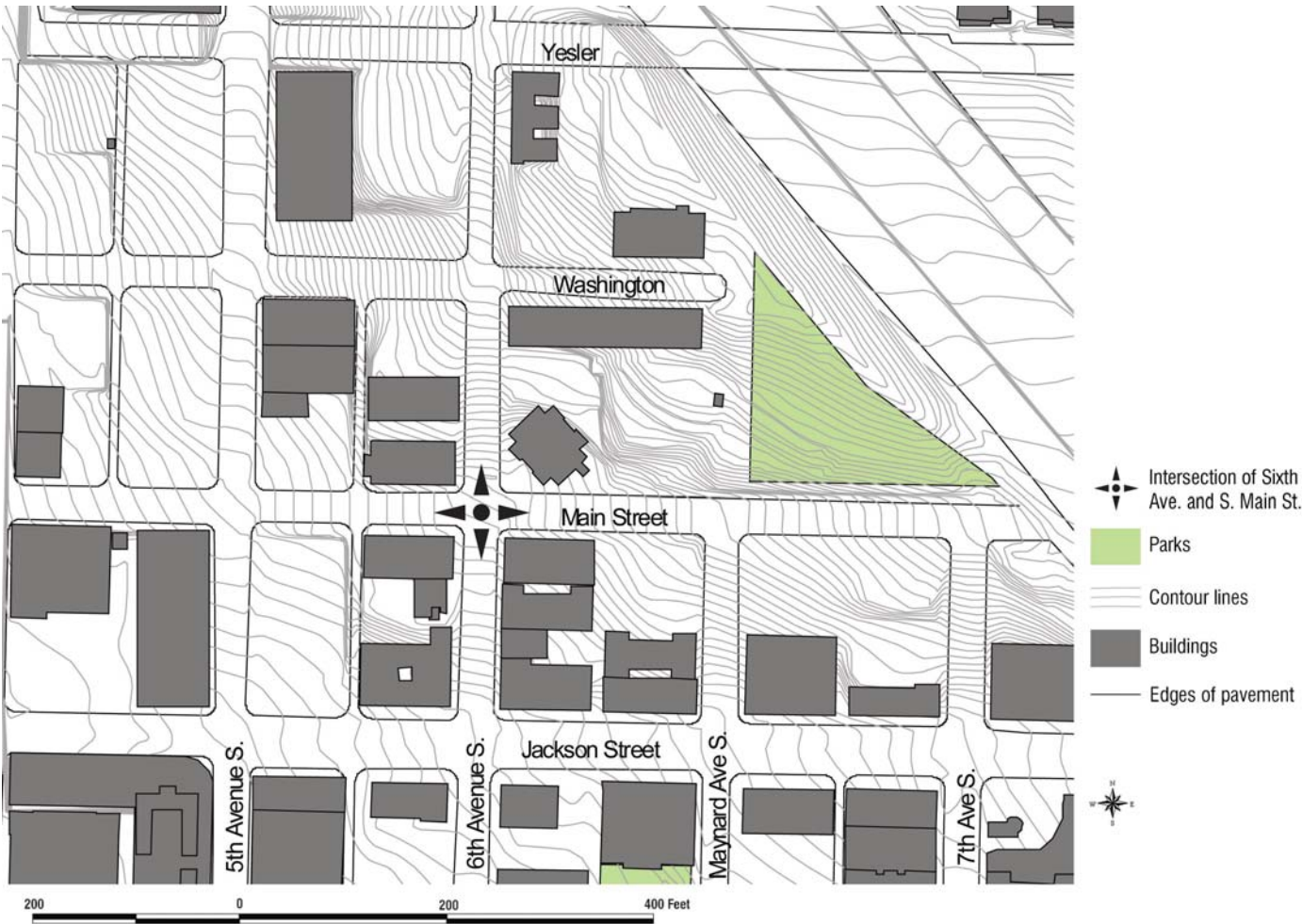
Affiliation (if applicable): _____

Street Address: _____

City, State, Zip Code: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____



Comments and recommendations